

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Case File No. AA-085400

AK-040-04-EA-033

Applicant: Wade Renfro

Type of
Action: Special Recreation Use Permit (Outfitter/Guide)

Location: The proposed action affects the BLM-administered lands within the eastern boundary of Game Management Unit (GMU) 18 where the Kilbuck Mountains are located. Specifically, the lands proposed are within the following Townships, Ranges, and Sections of the Seward Meridian.

T. 9 N., R. 59 W.

Sec. 3 to 10, inclusive; Sec. 13 to 21, inclusive; Sec. 29 to 32, inclusive.

T. 10 N., R. 59 W.

Sec. 2 to 10, inclusive; Sec. 15 to 22, inclusive; Sec. 27 to 34, inclusive.

T. 11 N., R. 59 W.

Sec. 26 to 29, inclusive; Sec. 31 to 35, inclusive.

T. 8 N., R. 60 W.

Sec. 1 to 12, inclusive; Sec. 15 to 23 inclusive; Sec. 25, 26, 27, 29 to 34, inclusive; and Sec. 36.

T. 10 N., R. 60 W.

Sec. 1, 2, 3, 9 to 16, inclusive; Sec. 19 to 36, inclusive.

T. 11 N., R. 60 W.

Sec. 36.

T. 7 N., R. 61 W.

Sec. 1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 22, 23, 26, 27, 34, and 35.

T. 8 N., R. 61 W.

Sec. 1 to 4, inclusive; Sec. 6, 9 to 15, inclusive; Sec. 22 to 27, inclusive; Sec. 34, 35, and 36.

T. 9 N., R. 61 W.

Sec. 1, 2, 11 to 14, inclusive; Sec. 23 to 26, inclusive; Sec. 35 and 36.

T. 10 N., R. 61 W.

Sec. 13, 14, 22 to 26, inclusive; Sec. 35 and 36.

USGS Quads 1:63,360: Bethel C-3, D-2, And D-3.

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Outdoor Recreation Planners

Preparing
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Date: August 13, 2004

I. INTRODUCTION

This Proposed Action involves commercial guiding use of public lands in Game Management Unit (GMU) 18. GMU 18 consists of the lower half of the Kuskokwim River and Yukon River watersheds. The area is bordered on the east by the Kilbuck Mountains and runs west as far as the Alaska coastline to the Bering Sea. The State of Alaska is divided into 26 GMUs. The Big Game Guide and Transporter Licensing Section has divided each GMU into "Guide Use Areas" (GUA).

The applicant requested to use a trapping cabin (AA-75642) owned by a Mr. Latham. The owner was informed he cannot sublease or rent the cabin as it would violate the terms of the lease.

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action:

The Anchorage Field Office (AFO) received an application from Wade Renfro (AA-085400) to conduct guided big game hunts on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) administered lands in GMU 18. The request included use of a cabin located at the confluence of Karl Creek and Fog River. This type of service is needed to meet the anticipated public demand for quality guided services which provide safe recreation opportunities in remote or relatively inaccessible locations in this area of Alaska.

B. Conformance With Land Use Plan:

This action is in conformance with the Southwest Management Framework Plan (MFP) dated November 1981, activity objectives Wildlife (WL-4), Recreation (R-3), and Minerals (M-2). These decisions do not directly address special recreation use permitting, but recognize that hunting, fishing, and trapping are legitimate uses of public land.

C. Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, Policies, Plans or Other Environmental Analyses:

A special recreation permit (SRP) is required for commercial recreation use including big game guiding on public land and water pursuant to 43 CFR 2930. Under this regulation, an applicant may be authorized to conduct commercial recreation activities on BLM administered land. The Authorized Officer may issue SRPs for five years subject to annual authorization. The permittee must satisfactorily meet the requirements associated with the SRP as well as conform to applicable laws and regulations on all other Federal and State administered lands and water.

Under State law a person must have a State of Alaska Guide Outfitter license to outfit and guide. Each outfitter is limited to operating three GUAs per year.

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVE

A. Proposed Action:

Mr. Wade Renfro proposes to guide one to four hunters annually for brown bear, black bear, and caribou. Mr. Renfro plans to commence guiding activities after April 15th and cease no later than October 15th each year. Generally, the big game hunting will take place in the spring and fall months and hunts typically last ten days. Renfro's Alaskan Adventures, Inc. will employ one to four registered guides depending on the species and the time of year.

All operations on BLM administered land will be accessed by plane landing on a tundra airstrip two miles east of the Latham Cabin. Mr. Renfro will base his operations from a tent camp near the airstrip east of the Latham cabin. All hunts will be performed on foot from that point. Mr. Renfro will adhere to "Leave No Trace" practices and will remove all elements of the temporary camps when not actively using the area.

B. No Action Alternative:

The No Action Alternative would be to continue current management of public land in the area. Commercial big game guiding would not occur on BLM administered public land.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. Critical Elements:

It has been determined that the following Critical Elements of the human environment are either not present or would not be affected by the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative:

- Air Quality
- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs)
- Environmental Justice (EJ)
- Farm Lands (prime or unique)
- Floodplains
- Invasive, Non-Native Species
- Native American Religious Concerns
- Water Quality (Surface/Ground)
- Wetlands/Riparian
- Wild and Scenic Rivers
- Wilderness

1. Cultural Resources:

No cultural resources are known for this area; however, this area has not yet been inventoried for cultural resources. The possibility exists that there are unreported sites in the area. In adjacent areas where cultural

resource surveys have been conducted, clusters of sites have been found which range from the historic period to prehistoric sites several thousands year old.

2. Threatened and Endangered (T&E) Species:

There are no Threatened or Endangered Species of animals known to occur in this region. There is no designated Critical Habitat for any Threatened or Endangered Species. There are no rare or sensitive plant species known to occur in the area.

3. Wastes, Hazardous and Solid:

There are no known wastes, hazardous or solid, in the area. There is low potential for trash or possible spills of petroleum products from past guiding operations.

4. Subsistence:

The availability and harvest of wildlife resources in GMU 18 is extremely complex and driven by regional as well as local conditions and issues which are subject to change. Currently a moratorium on the harvest of moose designed to restore depleted moose populations and low density bear populations are complicated by variable harvest patterns, predation, and habitat productivity over a broad landscape. The Mulchatna Caribou has been declining in recent years but still can sustain reasonable general and subsistence harvest. Harvest regulations over the last two years have reduced allowable harvests.

B. Land Status:

The public lands that would be affected by the proposed action are all managed by the BLM. For federal subsistence programs only those lands that are not selected by the state and native corporations are subject to subsistence regulations. Selected lands fall under the jurisdiction of the State of Alaska for the harvest and management of wildlife.

C. Wildlife:

The affected wildlife in the area of the proposed action are grizzly bear, black bear, caribou, wolf, and moose. Moderate to high densities of caribou occur in the area depending on seasonal migration patterns. Predators such as wolves, wolverine, and black and brown bear frequent the area, but are highly mobile and would be encountered infrequently. A ten year Kilbuck Brown Bear research indicates that Brown Bear populations to be one of the lowest productivity and densities if not the lowest in Alaska. The Mulchatna Caribou herd as of July 2004 numbers approximately 200,000 plus. A long term inter-agency

monitoring effort is in place to track caribou productivity, movement, seasonal distribution, age and sex structure, and harvest. The Mulchatna herd ranges through GMU's 9, 16, 17, 18, and 19.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

1. Critical Elements:

a. Cultural Resources:

The activities performed under this permit should have no impact on cultural resources if the standard stipulations regarding historic and archaeological resources are followed.

b. T&E Species:

The impact of the Proposed Action and Alternative on T&E plants and animals and their habitats has been evaluated in accordance with the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. Based on currently available information, the Proposed Action would not affect any T&E species or their habitats. Therefore, no consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is considered necessary pursuant to Section 7 of the Act.

c. Wastes, Hazardous or Solid:

Campsite activities will utilize fuel and other materials which contain oil and/or hazardous substances, such as batteries, oil/grease, pesticides (insect repellent). Human waste and wastewater will be generated by camp activities. Also non-hazardous solid waste (trash) will be generated.

There is potential for harm to the environment from spills or discharges associated with the use of oil and/or hazardous substances, and improper management of wastewater and trash generated by human activity at campsites.

d. Subsistence

The proposed action would result in negligible impacts to subsistence resources, movements of said resources, abundance of said resources or qualified Federal subsistence use access to said resources.

2. Wildlife:

There is potential for encounters with bears drawn into hunting camps by the presence of animal carcasses. This may increase the chance of the taking of bears for the defense of life or property.

B. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

Natural processes and current influences will remain. There is a potential loss of recreation opportunities for people desiring access to areas that are otherwise inaccessible to them.

C. Cumulative Impacts:

Commercially transported and guided hunting can and do have potential impacts on Federal subsistence resources and subsistence harvest of such resources. The degree of impact may be reduction of subsistence resources that result in actions as severe as total closure of Federal Public land areas managed by BLM to general hunting by Alaska residents or non residents for one or more species or exclusion of specific areas from such users. The dynamics of State and Federal management in this region may also force commercial outfitters completely out of GMU's heavily utilized by Federal and State subsistence users and into GMU's with BLM areas that are more remote or less accessible thus adding to contemporary harvest pressure in those areas.

D. Mitigation Measures:

1. Waste, Hazardous or Solid:

Non-hazardous solid waste (trash/refuse) may be burned in campfire pits. All unburned/unburnable trash/refuse should be back hauled from the area and disposed in an approved waste disposal site. All fire rings/pits should be removed or destroyed after use. Trash/refuse should not be disposed of in a Pit Privy.

Hazardous waste should be back hauled from the area and properly disposed by the generator. Fuel and oils should be stored a minimum of 150 feet from any water body. Spills of fuel, oil, or other hazardous substances should be cleaned up immediately. No dumping of fuel in pits on public land should be authorized.

2. Wildlife:

Hunting camps should be kept clean with no food or curing meat left where it would attract animals. Carcasses should be removed from the camp as soon as possible to avoid attracting bears to the site.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

A. List of Preparers:

Steve Lardy/Jake Schlapfer - Lead Preparers, Recreation
Larry Beck - Environmental Protection Specialist
Donna Redding - Cultural, Historic, and Paleontological
Jeff Denton - Subsistence, Wildlife
Bruce Seppi - Wildlife, T&E, Riparian